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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 071032Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2444
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
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RHBVAKS/COMUSNAVCENT

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 000449

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR R, NEA/ARP; NEA/PPD

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: UAE GOVERNMENT COMPLAINS ABOUT USG REGIONAL MEDIA
INTERVIEWS WITH UAE BACKDROPS

Sensitive but unclassified; please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) At the end of a meeting on other topics, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Anwar Gargash told the Charge May 5 that the UAEG is unhappy with regional USG media interviews using backdrops identified with UAE/Dubai locations. He pointed to two recent examples, both in Dubai, which caused senior UAEG leaders concern that the USG message might be too closely associated with the UAE due to the locations from which they were conveyed: 1) an official in military uniform against the backdrop of Sheikh Zayed Road, and 2) a USG spokeswoman against the backdrop of the Burj al-Arab hotel. (Note: When we asked, Gargash couldn't provide specifics -- the information clearly came to him from others in the leadership. End note.)

¶2. (SBU) This is a recurring (but infrequent) complaint of the UAEG, which generally supports USG regional media activity so long as our commentary is not visually associated with the UAE. The MinState was clearly relaying the concerns of more senior officials and gave three easy solutions to the problem: 1) use a featureless "black" backdrop, 2) conduct interviews in the studio or newsroom of the media outlet in question (he mentioned al-Arabiya and al-Jazeera) with no UAE backdrop, or 3) find a clearly neutral backdrop with no identifiable UAE scenery.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: We are in touch with the Department's Regional Media Hub and CENTCOM's Regional Engagement Cell (both based in Dubai), and are confident both understand the UAE sensitivities and ground rules, which the UAEG communicated to the Mission before either office was established. We request that the Department and CENTCOM provide this guidance in advance to any visitors planning regional media engagement here. If there are questions, all USG visitors should consult with the U.S. Mission Public Affairs Officer at Embassy Abu Dhabi. End comment.

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